

DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

25X1A

HANDLE VIA [] CONTROL SYSTEM

1 July 1966

TOP SECRET

MEMORANDUM TO : DOD - Mr. McNaughton
ACDA - Dr. Flax
CIA - Mr. Fisher 25X1A
White House - []
- Mr. Keeny
- Mr. Charles Johnson
MASC - Mr. Welsh
NASA - Mr. Seamans

SUBJECT : Draft Report of the NSAM 156 Committee
on "Political and Security Aspects of
Non-Military Applications of Satellite
Earth-Sensing"

1. We are slightly behind in meeting the target date suggested by Dr. Hornig and Mr. Schultze. Attached is a draft report on "Political and Security Aspects of Non-Military Applications of Satellite Earth-Sensing", prepared by my staff on the basis of our earlier discussions and the various contributions submitted by interested parties. I realize that not all of the specific issues which have been raised are dealt with in the report, but I strongly believe that our Committee should address itself to the general political and security guidelines for possible non-military programs, leaving to other appropriate forums the review of specific NASA and other program proposals, as well as judgments on alternatives, cost effectiveness, priorities, and the like.

2. In order to come as close as possible to our target date, I propose that we meet in my office on Wednesday, July 6, at 3:30 p.m. to discuss this draft report, and that we plan to meet again on Friday,

TOP SECRET

25X1A

Copy 6 of 12

State Dept. review completed

25X1A

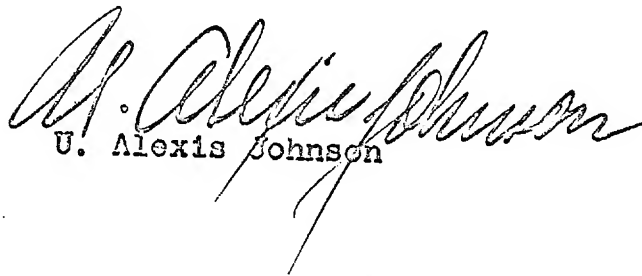
TOP SECRET

HANDLE VIA

☐ CONTROL SYSTEM

-2-

July 8, if another meeting is required to conclude our work and submit a report.


U. Alexis Johnson

Enclosure:

Draft Report on "Political and
Security Aspects of Non-Military
Applications of Satellite Earth-Sensing"

TOP SECRET

25X1A

☐

HANDLE VIA CONTROL SYSTEM

TOP SECRET

Political and Security Aspects of Non-
Military Applications of Satellite Earth-Sensing

1. The NSAM 156 Committee has reviewed the issues raised in the letter of April 4 from Mr. Charles L. Schultze and Dr. Donald F. Hornig to Secretary of State Dean Rusk (Appendix A), and submits the following report of its conclusions.

2. We believe that the "Report on Political and Informational Aspects of Satellite Reconnaissance Policy" prepared pursuant to NSAM 156 and approved on June 30, 1962, for transmittal to the President remains basically valid. The objective of avoiding open challenges to satellite observation activity has been generally met, and the Soviet Union has muted -- though not retracted -- its challenge to the principle of military space reconnaissance. Agreement has been reached on fundamental legal principles which do not ban (though they also do not explicitly sanction) space observation. Developments over the past four years have, however, led to a shift of emphasis from a need for actions that will build world acceptance of space observations, to a generally novel idea, to actions which will preserve the present wide tacit acceptance of such activities. Accordingly, there does not seem to be any imperative to launch disclosure initiatives for the purpose of furthering the general principle of space observation. On the other hand, it remains necessary to consider the possibly adverse effects of new public disclosures or other initiatives which could upset the present satisfactory situation.

3. Our chief concern over a challenge to the legitimacy and propriety of satellite reconnaissance has been the Soviet position. Over the past several years, the Russians have withdrawn insistence on branding such activity as illegal in the cases of international space agreements that they desired, and they do not press such arguments in the UN, but they have not stopped referring to such activities as espionage and as illegal. Moreover, the statements by Khrushchev and his son-in-law, Adzhuboi, admitting such Soviet activities and tacitly acquiescing in American activities have never been printed in the Soviet press or acknowledged as official, and they have not been even informally repeated by the present Soviet leaders. Accordingly, we see continuing pertinence of the NSAM 156

TOP SECRET

25X1A

Copy 5 of 12

25X1A

TOP SECRET

HANDLE VIA CONTROL SYSTEM

-2-

Report conclusion that: "It is extremely important that the US avoid public statements about our satellite operations that would pose a direct political challenge to the Soviet Union on the sensitive issue of reconnaissance."

4. It is now necessary to give more attention than heretofore to the reactions of other countries. To date, increasing public awareness of the existence of US and Soviet military space reconnaissance has not prompted concern in other countries for their own political or military security interests, but such concern is likely to develop as others become more aware of the nature and scope of satellite surveillance. Disclosure of surveillance capabilities, even indirectly in non-military contexts, will awaken new interest and in some cases concern. Accordingly, any such disclosure should be carefully considered and planned so as to prevent or reduce adverse reactions by other states that would be undesirable in their own right and could also be manipulated to our detriment by the Soviet Union.

5. Direct disclosure of satellite reconnaissance for the purpose of gaining world acceptance of the principle of space surveillance is both unnecessary and liable to provoke adverse reactions from the USSR and other states. On the other hand, in the long run the security of our reconnaissance program can be served by encouraging a natural, gradual growing world recognition of the potentialities of satellite earth-sensing in the context of scientific progress and economic betterment. Such recognition will grow whether we stimulate it or not. We can influence and channel, and if we wish retard, such a development -- but we cannot prevent it. We should recognize that any apparent US efforts to suppress or hobble peaceful applications because of presumed (and rightly presumed) sensitivity over protecting military reconnaissance would not serve our objective of retaining or improving tacit acceptance of unrestricted earth observation and sensing. A US position of favoring, leading, and sharing in non-military applications of satellite earth-sensing will not involve the same risks of provoking a confrontation with the Soviet Union as would direct disclosure of reconnaissance.

TOP SECRET

25X1A

25X1A

TOP SECRET

HANDLE VIA CONTROL SYSTEM

-3-

6. As noted above, non-military uses of space which require surveillance of the earth by various sensors would as a side effect inevitably stimulate wider awareness of the capabilities of reconnaissance, but in a more favorable context than would direct disclosure. We should recognize that different uses of any technology will continue to evoke different reactions. The familiar home, travel and hobby uses of ordinary cameras do not lessen objections to their use for intelligence collection. The same will be true of satellite cameras, and the Soviets have already shifted their position several years ago to objecting to the use of satellite intelligence collection, rather than objecting to satellite observation per se. This does not, however, seem to be a valid basis for opposing development of parallel non-military and continued military reconnaissance programs.

7. NASA's and other proposals for developing earth-sensing programs which might overlap, be derived in sanitized form from, or stimulate public interest in, classified reconnaissance programs should be judged on the basis of criteria such as feasibility, preference to non-space alternatives, cost, problems in protecting classified technology, and risks of security compromise of the classified reconnaissance program. It should usually be possible by careful planning to mitigate possible adverse political repercussions of the incidental disclosure of surveillance capabilities and hence to give political and national security clearance to such programs. The best justification for such programs, and the best general basis for calming any alarm over their effects, will be valid scientific or economic payoff in which other countries can expect to share.

8. The primary area of competition in space between the United States and the Soviet Union has been and will for the next few years continue to be the race to the moon. This is, however, largely a short term competition for the 1960's. In the longer run, there may develop a competition in space applications developing the resources of the world, particularly of the underdeveloped world. Communications satellites and meteorological satellites have already contributed to this end, but their benefits do not exhaust

TOP SECRET

25X1A

TOP SECRET

HANDLE VIA

25X1A
CONTROL SYSTEM

-4-

the potential value of earth-sensing satellites for developing and using natural resources.

9. In the deliberations of this Committee, differences of view arose over the relative merits of using satellites or aircraft for natural resource surveys and other earth-sensing activities in the "reconnaissance range" of satellite sensing (that is, roughly below 20 to 30 meters in precision of ground resolution). This Committee has not attempted to resolve such differences; they clearly reflect an important question, but our present focus is on political and security guidelines for use of such satellite programs in this range as may be determined to be economically and scientifically justified. In addition, there would appear to be unresolved questions with respect to the alternatives of using unmanned or manned satellites for these purposes.

10. A natural resources program of the kind in which NASA is interested can in time provide vast data, using a variety of spaceborne sensors. However, the NASA program as now envisaged does not include operational use of remote-sensing techniques before the 1970s, principally because most of the sensors are presently programmed for use in sophisticated manned spacecraft as part of the post-1970 Apollo Applications Program. There is no funding as yet of less complex, less expensive unmanned systems.

11. One current problem which emerges is the question of use of certain equipment and photographic materials from the classified reconnaissance program to assist NASA in evaluating the utility of, and developing techniques for, satellite photography for exploiting natural resources. In order to develop a thorough understanding of observation satellite technology, it would seem desirable to consider whether NASA can be provided -- on a classified basis, but perhaps under less restrictive classification controls -- both selected satellite photographs for evaluation, and selected satellite hardware, including cameras. The ground-work would thus be prepared for possible future operational use in natural resource survey missions. The equipment to be used need not -- and in our view should not -- represent the latest, highest resolution cameras. But considerable useful work could, for example, be accomplished with resolutions on the order of 10-15 feet. Some of the many applications that could be usefully served with resolutions of this level include mapping, surveys of water resources,

TOP SECRET

25X1A

TOP SECRET

HANDLE VIA CONTROL SYSTEM

-5-

25X1A
agricultural and forestry surveys, and studies of land use over broad areas. Suitable cameras for these purposes already exist in the KH programs, and the release to NASA of both selected equipment and photography taken in the past could be useful and presumably could be done without raising unmanageable security problems. The cameras and photography from the KH systems could remain classified; only the products of actual NASA missions would probably need to be unclassified. In cases where a decision had been made for NASA to proceed with a given program for which unclassified cameras or other equipment could be used, NASA could let contracts to the NRO industrial contractors, who could then in fact adapt on an unclassified basis equipment originally designed for the classified program. In the case of classified equipment, the NRO could provide such assistance, as it is doing in the use of in the Apollo lunar-orbiter program, or classified contracts could be arranged for necessary adaptation of existing classified equipment. NASA would prefer to the greatest extent possible to use unclassified equipment. On the other hand, permissible NASA programs would necessarily be more severely limited if only unclassified equipment could be used, and for a range of cases valuable photographic data could be released while the equipment would need to remain classified.

12. Public awareness of the quality of some of the lower resolution materials released in non-military contexts need not have damaging effect on the viability of unilateral reconnaissance programs, provided care is exercised in the type of materials released and the manner of release. Security of the classified national reconnaissance program would also be enhanced by having NASA conduct the actual launch and retrieval operations of the non-reconnaissance programs.

13. The United States will, in any case, find it increasingly difficult to control public disclosure of satellite surveillance capabilities. To date, the US and the USSR have maintained tacitly acknowledged but unpublicized mutual reconnaissance surveillance. Lately, the USSR has shown what may be indications of a slight loosening up of their own reticence to discuss satellite sensing capabilities by releasing TV photographs of the

TOP SECRET

25X1A

25X1A

TOP SECRET

HANDLE VIA CONTROL SYSTEM

-6-

earth taken by the Molniya satellite, and by publishing in their own press earlier US-released Gemini photographs (without attribution of the source). These steps suggest a possible Soviet willingness to accustom the world to the idea that non-reconnaissance photography from space is a normal activity, and could foreshadow an openly acknowledged future Soviet satellite program for earth-sensing and natural resources development. (The USSR may also use this knowledge later to attempt to undercut the American position on disarmament verification, and as noted earlier this would not necessarily imply any softening of Soviet objection to open acknowledgement of reconnaissance.) Other countries, too, may be contemplating similar programs. Recent French studies of the use of aerial photography for geographic uses have indicated an interest in the use of space platforms as well as aircraft. This interest is not surprising; France is only the first of several countries with developing space programs which will be investigating useful economic or scientific satellite programs in an area that has not already been preempted by the USA or the USSR. In the likelihood that other countries will soon be operating or at least openly discussing the use of observation satellites, it would be to the US advantage to be prepared to take the lead in such discussions and activities. Indeed, at some point we may wish to consider cooperative and collaborative programs not only with other countries in Western Europe and Japan, but even with the USSR, if the political climate were appropriate.

14. The United States should consider steps to apply its highly developed and developing photographic capabilities for the benefit of the underdeveloped countries. In this way the United States can be in a position to provide tangible evidence of our interest in helping developing countries, while forestalling or overmatching possible Soviet propaganda initiative in that field. This will require consideration of a whole range of political, as well as scientific-technical and security, factors. For example, merely advising developing countries of new resources and opportunities will not always win us plaudits if we are not prepared to assist these countries in realizing these potentialities. Nonetheless, in the longer run there would appear to be real political opportunities to us in taking a more active role than the Soviet Union

TOP SECRET

25X1A

25X1A

TOP SECRET

HANDLE VIA

CONTROL SYSTEM

-7-

in applying satellite earth observation to non-military economic uses. This long-run political interest reinforces other reasons for developing the potentialities of non-military uses of earth-sensing by satellites.

15. From the standpoint of protecting security of the classified national reconnaissance program, NASA programs should proceed gradually through current aerial experimentation, to unmanned and manned satellites, and in general moving slowly from less to more precise ground resolution. The technical limits placed on security grounds could probably change as the general state of the art of classified technological capabilities improves and as public awareness and appreciation of them advances. Thus, for example, in the late 1960's there might be release of photography of 10-30 meters resolution, with public discussion of potential future economic applications of 10 to 30 feet. By the early 1970's, there might be experimental and operational releases of 10 to 30 feet, and discussion of 5 to 10 feet. This process of reducing the security margin could not go on indefinitely, but the line of sensitivity probably could recede along the lines indicated above as both technological and political security limitations become less acute.

16. At some point, probably after there had been further initial exploratory study, it would appear that the United States -- perhaps the President himself -- could launch a major public program. At that time, experimental NASA aerial and space photographs could be released, and NASA program plans and expectations described -- all without reference to the classified program. Such an initiative would maximize political gains for the United States. It could, of course, also prompt prominent speculation about classified reconnaissance activities, but such speculation could probably be fended off, and possible hostile Soviet reactions would probably be foreclosed or undercut by the wide interest that the program should generate. However, the question of whether and how any such initiative should be made should probably be deferred at this time, and in any case will require further careful consideration.

17. It should be noted that public recognition, even on an incomplete basis, of satellite observation capabilities would also have reverberations in other fields. For

TOP SECRET

25X1A

TOP SECRET

HANDLE VIA

CONTROL SYSTEM

-8-

example, public awareness of such capabilities should assist in building a consensus in support of disarmament proposals which rely on satellite surveillance. At the same time, it may also be used by others to argue against requirements for other verification measures in cases where such requirements remain. By and large, disclosure of surveillance capabilities within the limits we are suggesting would not seem to pose critical problems for the US in distinguishing between what satellite observation can and cannot verify for the purposes of disarmament negotiations.

18. Recommendations:

(1) The classified national reconnaissance program should be protected by careful consideration of the political, as well as technical proliferation, effects of public discussion of earth-sensing activities of any given nature and level of surveillance capability.

(2) There is potential great political capital in a US program of national resource surveys and other scientific and economic exploitation of satellite earth observation and sensing, provided the basis has been properly laid, and the announcement of such a program is able to draw upon and project viable economic promise.

(3) At present, and for the next several years, NASA should proceed with its tentatively planned experimental program, which calls for initial earth-orbit use of multi-spectral synoptic cameras with a 30 meter resolution, and wide spectral scanners, beginning in 1969.

(4) NASA should, for the next five years -- subject to possible future review and revision of guidelines -- restrict its own public discussion, and to the extent possible contractor discussion, to future possibilities in the range above 10-15 feet ground resolution. The same restriction should apply to all other interested Government agencies. In order to facilitate proper classified control to apply the above guidelines, and additional detailed implementing guidelines developed by NASA with the concurrence of DRO, a NSAM should be issued directing all other civilian agencies with an interest in satellite earth-sensing to make known their interests in that field to, and

TOP SECRET

25X1A

25X1A

TOP SECRET

HANDLE VIA CONTROL SYSTEM

-9-

coordinate fully with, NASA. Apart from other advantages to be expected from such an articulation of responsibilities, it should enable NASA to apply the agreed classified guidelines limitations to other civilian agencies.

(5) NASA and other appropriate agencies should consider carefully the relative merits and costs of aerial and other possible alternatives to various space-borne earth-sensing programs in terms of practical political interests as well as cost effectiveness. Similarly, the respective merits of manned and unmanned satellites will of course require consideration.

(6) USID should be asked to review:

(a) The question of removing reference to the fact that the US has an operational satellite reconnaissance program from codeword control, retaining either a SECRET or TOP SECRET classification. This would permit explanation of the reason for limitations, on a classified basis, to Government personnel concerned with non-military satellite earth-sensing programs but without a need-to-know the performance capabilities or product of the classified program, and could improve security. At present, uncleared personnel often voice their speculations about reconnaissance programs and even capabilities on an unclassified and uncontrolled basis.

(b) Selective removal of appropriate photography from codeword control for classified use by selected NASA and other cleared personnel studying the potentialities of non-military earth-sensing activities, or, alternatively but less desirably, clearance of an increased number of NASA personnel for such use of those materials under present codeword control.

(c) Review and establishment by the appropriate bodies of minimal security restrictions on cameras and other sensing apparatus and equipment which can be made available for NASA's

TOP SECRET

25X1A

TOP SECRET

HANDLE VIA CONTROL SYSTEM

-10-

program of non-military applications of satellite earth-sensing. It is recognized that substantial compartmentalization will probably have to remain, but the non-military programs should be enabled to profit from relevant achievements of the military program to the extent feasible.

(7) Further consideration should be given to a major political initiative advancing the concept of economic betterment through space activities. If such an initiative is decided upon, it should come at a time when sufficient work has been done to demonstrate the potentialities and offer reasonable promise of some early payoff. For demonstrative purposes, carefully selected reconnaissance photography might be used to supplement available NASA photography.

TOP SECRET

25X1A